



STATE OF MAINE

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

April 30, 2020

Greetings:

These uncertain times have been particularly difficult for Maine's small businesses and the self-employed. We know that waiting for unemployment benefits has been a challenge for many, but help is on the way. We write with good news for you. The Maine Department of Labor (Department) will begin accepting applications for the new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program tomorrow at 8 a.m. Friday, May 1.

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) is a new federal program which expands eligibility for unemployment benefits to certain categories of workers not typically able to receive unemployment in the past and those who are unable to work as a direct result of the coronavirus public health emergency, such as the following:

- Self-employed workers
- Farmers/fishermen
- Independent contractors
- Nonprofit employees not already covered by regular state unemployment benefits
- Gig economy workers
- Workers who do not have enough work history and earnings to be eligible for traditional unemployment benefits
- Others who have been determined ineligible for regular unemployment benefits

Tips for Applying Friday May 1—Please Help Us Keep the System Running Smoothly

- Please apply for PUA using the online system which is available 24/7: <https://www.maine.gov/unemployment/>
- There is no need to rush to apply. Benefits will be retroactive and your benefit for this week is through Saturday May 2nd at 11:59 p.m.
- Phone lines (1-800-593-7660) are open 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Friday May 1 and, because of the launch of this new program, on Saturday May 2nd 8 a.m. to 12 noon.
- **On Friday only:** To balance the load on internet traffic and keep the process moving during the first part of the day, please follow this alphabetical schedule for applying on line. After 2 p.m., please access the system any time 24/7.
 - If your last name begins with A-H, go online 8-10 a.m.
 - If your last name begins with I-Q, go online 10-12 noon
 - If your last name begins with R-Z, go online 12 noon-2 p.m.

Let's work together to make sure that all self-employed people who want to apply on Friday can do so and expand benefits to those who will now be eligible in these unprecedented, challenging times.

Sincerely,

Laura A. Fortman
Commissioner, Maine Department of Labor

Additional Information on the PUA Program:

What actions should I take now? Claimants under PUA should do the following:

- **1. No Action Need:** If you have already applied for state unemployment benefits and been denied due to insufficient earnings, you do NOT need to reapply for PUA. Your claim is in the system and will automatically transfer to PUA, and you should continue filing your weekly certification.
- **2. No Action Needed:** If you have filed for state unemployment benefits and your claim remains pending, do not file for PUA until this claim is resolved. You can only collect PUA benefits if you are ineligible for state unemployment benefits. If you are denied, we will automatically enroll you in PUA. Continue filing your weekly certification.
- **3. No Action Needed:** If you are self-employed and were denied state unemployment benefits before PUA became available, we will automatically enroll in you in PUA. You will need to file weekly certifications, and if you have any outstanding weekly certifications to be filed, the system will allow you to file for the weeks noted as far back as the week ending March 21.
- **4. File a PUA Claim:** If you are self-employed and have not yet filed a claim, you can do so beginning May 1. Retroactive weeks will also be available as described above. You will also need to submit your weekly certification each week thereafter.
- **5. File a Claim:** If you are NOT self-employed and have not yet filed an initial claim under any unemployment program, you may do so at any time. If you are determined ineligible for state benefits, your claim will be automatically converted to a PUA claim.

When will I receive benefits? Once you have filed weekly claims, you should begin receiving benefits within seven days from filing.

Will claims be retroactive? All claims will be retroactive to the date of business closure or job separation provided on the application, initially back as far as March 15, as long as individuals have filed weekly certifications for each week. If someone was affected by COVID-19 prior to March 15, please contact the claims center to claim for those weeks.

How will I provide earnings information? *Do not send any documents right now.* To expedite the benefits process, claimants are not required at this time to send the Department paper or electronic copies of documents showing their earnings. Eventually, the Department will need documentation because wages of people who are self-employed are not normally reported to the Department. **Do not submit paperwork at this time.** The Department will proactively notify people by email later in May who are self-employed when it is time to submit the documentation, what to provide and how to provide it.

How much will I receive under PUA? PUA benefits start at 50% of the average weekly state unemployment benefit for self-employed and those who do not meet monetary eligibility for regular unemployment. This is \$172/week. If you are self-employed, once we are able to verify documented earnings, PUA benefits will be adjusted retroactively. In addition, anyone who receives a PUA benefit also receives the full \$600 additional weekly benefit from the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program, which is available for the weeks ending April 4 through July 25, 2020. Claimants will also need to file a certification every week in order to receive benefits.

Where can I find more information? Please see our PUA webpage for more information including Frequently Asked Questions and PowerPoint slides: <https://www.maine.gov/unemployment/pua/>.